

Healthy Kentuckians 2010: Social Influences

Healthy Kentuckians 2010 recommends increasing the proportion of schools with tobacco-free environments, increasing the proportion of worksites that prohibit smoking, and increasing the proportion of localities that adopt ordinances and/or policies to restrict tobacco use.² Since youth are influenced by parents, siblings, peers, and community norms, a broad-based, consistent community approach is needed to reduce the social influences to use tobacco products. Community efforts combined with strong advocacy, taxation, media interventions, and policy change involving parents and community partners are the most effective in reducing tobacco use.⁷

Social Influences

Peer Group Use of Tobacco

- ✓ Half of middle school and almost three-fourths of high school students have one or more smokers among their four closest friends.
- ✓ Nearly one-third of middle school and four of 10 of high school students have one or more smokeless tobacco users among their four closest friends.

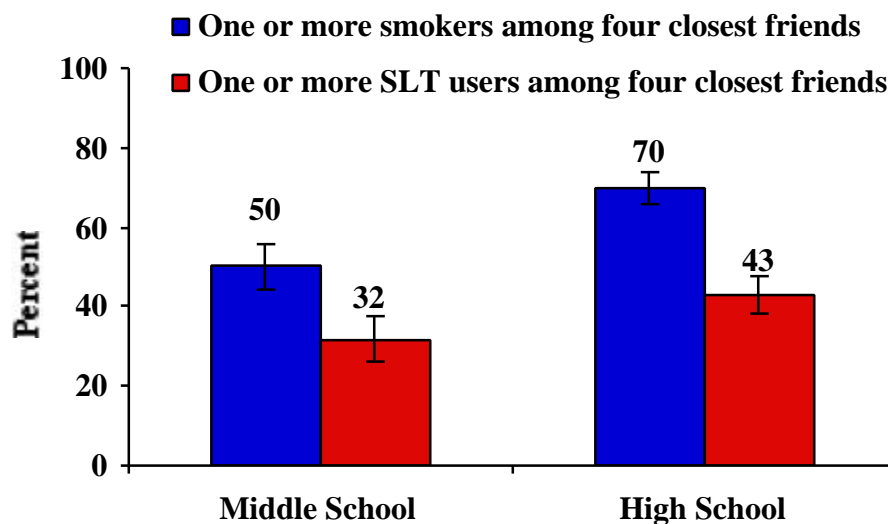


Figure 49. Students with one or more smokers or SLT users among their four closest friends

Background and Significance

Consistent with the tobacco use prevalence patterns, Kentucky youth report that their closest friends are smokers. While fewer identify their peers with smokeless tobacco use, there remains peer influence to chew and spit tobacco. Young people learn about the acceptability of tobacco use from their social environment including peers, family members, school policies, and public place restrictions on tobacco use. Strong tobacco-free policies in schools, homes, and public places model a tobacco-free environment for young people.

Social Influences

Susceptibility to Start Smoking

Nonsmokers are considered susceptible to smoking if they said they would smoke a cigarette soon, would definitely smoke a cigarette in the next year, and would definitely smoke if their best friend offered them a cigarette.¹

- ✓ Susceptibility to start smoking does not vary significantly by grade.

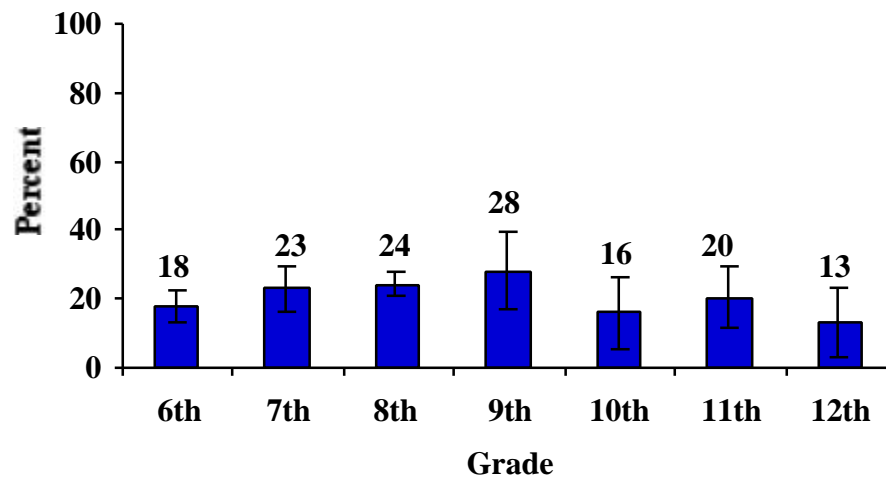


Figure 50. Never smokers who are susceptible to start smoking

Background and Significance

Nationally, 23% of middle school nonsmokers and 24% of high school nonsmokers are classified as being susceptible to initiate smoking in the next year.¹ Consistent with national data, Kentucky middle school children are just as likely to start smoking, as are high school students. Young people's perceptions of smoking behavior in their environment are among the most powerful psychosocial forces influencing whether they begin to smoke.²⁴ Cigarette smoking among friends, peers, siblings, and others from the young person's immediate environment is consistently associated with smoking initiation.³

Social Influences

Parent Involvement in Tobacco Prevention

- ✓ Regardless of gender and age, most students have been told by their parents about the dangers of tobacco use.
- ✓ High school smokers are more likely to report that a parent told them about the dangers of tobacco use than high school nonsmokers.

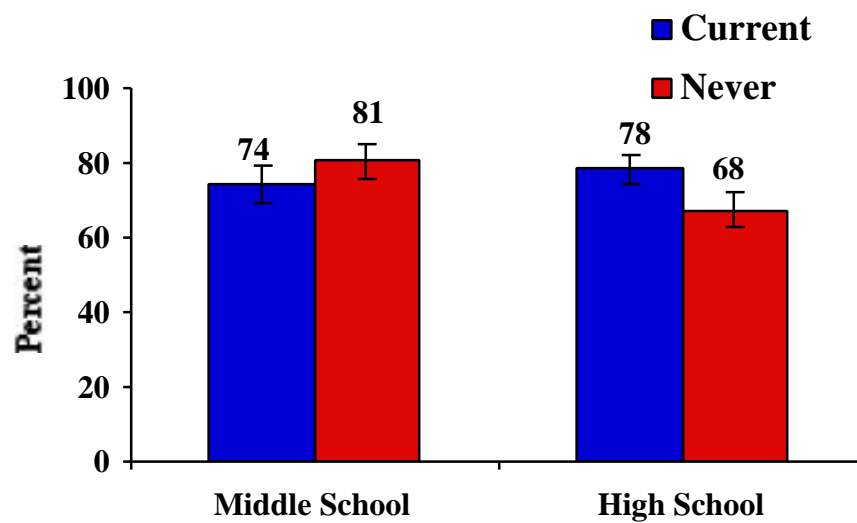


Figure 51. Current smokers and never smokers who have been told by at least one parent or guardian about the dangers of tobacco use

Background and Significance

While most parents of middle school children in Kentucky are talking with their children about the dangers of tobacco use, fewer parents of high school nonsmokers do the same. Given that high school nonsmokers are just as likely to start smoking as middle school nonsmokers (see Figure 50), it is important for all parents to discuss the dangers of tobacco use regardless of the child's age. Parent involvement plays an important role in tobacco prevention. Children whose parents set clear, consistent rules about not using tobacco products are less likely to use tobacco products. Merely explaining the dangers of tobacco use is not enough.

Strategies for Reducing Social Influences to Use Tobacco

Based on CDC Best Practices

Policy Development

- ❑ Adopt school curricula that address social influences (friends, family, and the media) that encourage tobacco use among youth.
- ❑ Strengthen tobacco use policies in the schools by implementing the CDC *Guidelines for School Health Programs to Prevent Tobacco Use and Addiction*.
- ❑ Adopt state and local clean indoor air laws.
- ❑ Ensure rigorous enforcement of illegal tobacco sales to minors.

Community Mobilization

- ❑ Foster community readiness for tobacco prevention by soliciting support from community leaders.
- ❑ Invest in efforts to help adults quit using tobacco products to create tobacco-free adult role models for youth.
- ❑ Involve parents in local tobacco prevention coalitions and school-based activities.
- ❑ Engage youth in planning and conducting community tobacco prevention and education events and campaigns.
- ❑ Enhance capacity for tobacco prevention by building on existing community networks and coalitions.

Information Dissemination/Media Advocacy

- ❑ Conduct counter advertising campaigns to deglamorize the use of tobacco products.
- ❑ Link school-based efforts with local community tobacco prevention coalitions and state counter-advertising programs.

Professional Development and Training

- ❑ Include information on changing community norms in all tobacco prevention training workshops.

Surveillance/Evaluation

- ❑ Continue to monitor the social influences related to youth tobacco use by conducting the Kentucky Youth Tobacco Survey.